DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 052 EA 022 765

AUTHOR Borden, Sandi; And Others
TITLE Harnessing the power of Beliefs: Guides for Policy and Practice. Insights on Educational Policy and Practice Number 11.
INSTITUTION Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, Tex.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Jul 89
CONTRACT 400-86-0008
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Insights on Educational Policy and Practice; n11 Jul 1989

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Institutional Mission; *Organizational Objectives; School Effectiveness; *School Restructuring; State Standards
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

A set of belief statements outlined by Texas educators that express fundamental assumptions about individual responsibilities, school obligations, and educational system goals are described in this educational policy bulletin. The following five criteria are used to test each belief statement: relevance; importance; common meaning; context; and universality. Ten belief statements comprising a declaration of intent for policy review and design are outlined; they provide a framework for evaluating the educational organizational structure and a starting point for building a new one. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

Number 11 July 1989

Harnessing the Power of Beliefs: Guides for Policy and Practice

ED330052

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Wilson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 022 765

INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE
Number 11 July 1989

Harnessing the Power of Beliefs: Guides for Policy and Practice

The statements of belief presented in this document were developed to serve as a foundation for efforts to guide restructuring of the educational system in Texas. Restructuring is not adding more of the same or even making significant improvements to the existing structure. Restructuring requires that the current system be redesigned to meet the demands of a changed society. A dedicated group of Texas educators devoted time and energy to creating this set of statements that express fundamental beliefs about the responsibilities of individuals, the obligations of schools, and the goals of the educational system.

Clear purpose and direction are essential for effectively restructuring an educational system. Acting on the conviction that vision is needed to define "the right thing to do," members of the SEDL/Texas "Organizing for Excellence" Partners group developed the following set of belief statements to provide a foundation for redesigning educational policy and practice at all levels of the system. The group tested each belief statement using the following five criteria:

1. Relevance: Is this a fundamental, core belief?

2. Importance: Can we answer the question, "What difference does this statement make?"

3. Common Meaning: Can this statement be understood by the average person? Is it clearly stated?

4. Context: Does the statement *fit* within the context of the whole set. Does it contribute to the whole meaning?

5. Universality: Can this belief be applied at all levels (school, district, state); to all involved (students, teachers, administrators, parents, school board members, etc.); and in all areas (curriculum, instruction, staff development, budgeting, etc.)?

Declaration of Intent

Every individual has a vested interest in the success of schooling. To ensure that success, we must build a system based on vision and moral purpose. Our intent must be to restructure the educational system into a learning community that supports, affirms, and reflects in its every operation the following fundamental beliefs.

1. *Every person has equal value and worth.*

The educational system must be designed to affirm the dignity and worth of all who participate in it. Though an individual's behavior will affect the degree to which he or she is held in esteem by others, the basic humanity shared by all must be acknowledged and respected. This must be the basis for all educational decision making in a highly heterogeneous society. The value placed on education for all in the U.S. must be matched with a commitment to value each person's language and ethnic identity. Students must be assured that their ethnic and cultural heritage is viewed as equal to any other. Parents/guardians must be assured that their thoughts and feelings are given equal consideration regardless of their ethnic, educational, or socioeconomic background. Teachers, other staff, and administrators at all levels of the system must be assured that their contributions to the edu-

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 E. Seventh Street, Austin, Texas 78701 (512) 476-6861

EA 022 765

cational process are of equal value to those of others. Full and enthusiastic participation in the educational system is stimulated through an active and ongoing affirmation of the inherent worth of each individual.

2. ***Every person can learn and realize success.***

The system must be prepared to deal with students at the levels of knowledge, skills, and attitudes with which they enter the system. The schooling experience must be structured so that every student can move from where he or she *is at* to where they need to be to experience success in learning and in life.

The inclusion of *every person* in this belief statement promotes the idea that learning is an ongoing process for adults as well as children. Each individual can continue to learn and attain greater success. The system must be prepared to provide parents/guardians with opportunities to understand the purpose of schooling and to contribute to their children's success. The system must provide teachers, other staff, and administrators with the professional growth opportunities they need to succeed in their work with students.

3. ***Together, the family, the school, and the community control the conditions for success.***

The success of learning, teaching, school administration, and family welfare is an *interdependent* endeavor. It requires the coordinated efforts of the separate forces of family, school, and community. Together, the family, the school, and the community must forge a *learning community* that unites spheres of responsibility, areas of interest, resources, and common goals to create conditions for success. The weaving of these three forces into such a *learning community* will invalidate all excuses for failure. There must be a recognition that much of our learning occurs outside of the school, and that both the family and the community provide valuable learning resources.

4. ***Schools must develop knowledge, skills, thinking processes, and attitudes for successful living today and for tomorrow's world.***

Schools promote the development of the whole person in the present and for the future. The educational system must be designed to provide students with the basic knowledge required to function in a technological society; with the ability to analyze problems, to access information, and to develop alternatives; and with the understanding that learning is a continuing process. Schools must deal with the cognitive and the affective, the vocational and the avocational, the realities and the possibilities.

Learning is a lifelong process; therefore, students must be prepared to learn throughout life. In addition, the definition of *student* must be expanded to include people of any age with a desire to learn. The educational system must provide parents/guardians with an appreciation of the need for continued learning and for analytical thinking. It must provide teachers, other staff, and administrators with the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and to develop new skills and attitudes required in a changing world so that they can better address the needs of students.

5. ***In a democratic society, schools must ensure the opportunities necessary for all individuals to reach their potential.***

A democracy requires the full participation of its citizenry. Full participation depends on all individuals achieving their full potential to contribute to the economy and culture of the nation. *Webster's Dictionary* defines *potential* as "something that can develop or become actual." This means that each individual has an array of possibilities limited only by innate

physical or genetic factors. Schools must ensure conditions that encourage these possibilities to develop to their fullest.

We can no longer afford a system that meets the needs of only a certain percentage of our students. The educational system must be structured so that students from all ethnic groups, from all socioeconomic levels, and those with special needs are ensured the opportunity to reach their potential. While individual acceptance of those opportunities is necessary, the realization of full potential is contingent on the educational system developing within the individual the skills and attitudes that enable learning.

In addition, all parents/guardians should have the opportunity to participate as part of the learning community. They should have a chance to learn what they need to know to reach their own potential as well as to help their children. Teachers, other staff, and administrators should have staff development opportunities to grow and develop.

6. ***Schools must enable individuals to assume responsibility for their own behavior and performance.***

The educational system must be redesigned from a system focused on external control to one that encourages individuals to develop a sense of responsibility for their own behavior and performance. To *enable* is to provide the means or the opportunity that makes something possible. Therefore, skills and knowledge necessary to assume responsibility must be identified and learned. Responsibility must be both given and accepted. Barriers to responsibility must be recognized and overcome, and mutual support for all individuals must be provided.

7. ***Schools that honor courtesy, mutual respect, obligation, and shared commitment provide the best conditions for success.***

The educational system must foster an atmosphere in which courtesy and respect are observed in all interactions between people; where everyone feels free to express their ideas; where individuals fulfill their obligation to accept responsibility for the success of the whole; and where everyone is committed to working together toward common goals.

8. ***Collaboration and cooperation are essential for arriving at the best decisions and for implementing successful solutions.***

The educational system must be redesigned so that every level provides opportunities for input into the decision-making process by those who will be involved in carrying out the decisions. Because the best decisions emerge from a consideration of viable options, it is important to include those individuals who have the experience and the information needed to identify the options. Collaboration — the joining together — of those who are concerned about an issue produces the quality of information needed to gain insight into the possibilities; cooperation — working together for mutual benefit — generates the best options from which to choose. The inclusion of teachers, other staff, and administrators in decision-making processes reflects an enlightened leadership philosophy that promotes a sense of *ownership* in the decision. This sense of ownership, in turn, generates a commitment to the successful implementation of decisions and encourages individuals to harmonize their respective professional judgments and responsibilities.

9. ***Individuals and schools must be empowered with sufficient authority to carry out responsibilities for which they are held accountable.***

Accountability is an essential ingredient at all levels of the educational system. Staff at each level of the system should be held accountable for those areas for which they are responsible,

but accountability should be coupled with sufficient control over the conditions for success. Empowerment — giving legal authority or official sanction — provides the opportunity to effectively carry out responsibilities.

10. ***Successful schools require a climate that encourages creativity and innovation.***

In a world where change is rapid and information grows in geometric proportions, the educational system must encourage creativity and innovation. While care must be taken to avoid jumping onto each new and untested bandwagon, there also must be an acceptance of the risks involved in trying new ideas and new ways of doing things. Within the *learning community*, people at all levels must recognize that fear of failure will effectively stifle both creativity and innovation.

Conclusion

This set of beliefs can provide that "mechanism" suggested by Drucker for identifying and systematically eliminating those policies, programs, or activities that are unproductive, dysfunctional, or obsolete. Such a set of belief statements can provide a frame for evaluating the current organizational structure and a starting point for building a new structure. If there are elements of the current system that do not support the beliefs, or that are actually contradictory, those elements should be eliminated. When designing new policies or adopting new practices, the belief statements can serve as a guide to "the right thing to do."

The following Texas educators were involved in the development of the Statements of Belief:

Sandi Borden
Michelle DeAtley
Patricia Duttweiler
Robert Farquharson
Radford Gregg
Harry Griffith
Patricia Mengwasser
Sue Mutchler
Ruben Olivarez
Dawson Orr
Luis Plascencia
Charles Reavis
Brad Ritter
Adrienne Segal
Thomas Sergiovanni

INSIGHTS, *SEDL's update on innovations and emerging topics related to educational policy and practice, is produced by ED-AIDE, a policy information service project, and by Theme C, Improving Teacher and Administrator Performance.*

SEDL || OERI

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly, or in part, by the Office of Educational Research & Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract Number 400-86-0008. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE